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WIN THE BATTLE with the Natural Man

Through Jesus Christ and His Atonement, we can put off the natural man and become Saints.

The scriptures teach us how we can put off “the natural man” and become Saints through Jesus Christ and His Atonement (Mosiah 3:19). Like all of us, I have been battling with the natural man for many years. But I am determined to never relax, retreat, or retire from the fight.

The natural man is the mortal part of us that allows our temporal desires to overrule our inherent spiritual goodness and our desires to become like our Heavenly Parents.¹ Of course, we won’t win the fight immediately. It is a daily battle for each of us, and we depend upon God and Jesus Christ to help us change our nature.

From Stubby to Spinner

I had a horse who helped me appreciate the amazing process of change. When our children were young, my wife and I looked for a gentle children’s horse. Our neighbor had such a horse, but he would sell us kind and gentle Bob only if we also bought his other horse, Stubby. The names alone describe the horses. Eventually we decided to purchase both horses to acquire Bob.

Sure enough, Bob was wonderful, and Stubby ended up being a stubborn, strong-willed, obnoxious animal who consistently acted up and caused trouble with the other horses. I usually ended up riding Stubby during our family rides. He was defiant. When I tried to turn right, Stubby fought to go left. If I wanted to gallop, he would buck or crow-hop.



I decided to do all I could to help bring about a change in Stubby's disposition. I corrected bad behavior and rewarded good behavior. I rode him side by side with our well-behaved horses. I rode him frequently and groomed him often. Over time, Stubby began to soften. He submitted more readily to the saddle and bridle, and he began allowing me to guide and control him without resistance.

As Stubby's disposition improved, he surprisingly became my horse of choice. He was energetic and had good stamina. He was not at all hesitant or fearful in challenging situations, and in a group of other horses, he led out without needing to be urged on. Over a period of 10 to 15 years, Stubby developed

into an exceptional lead horse. In fact, Stubby made such a turnaround that we changed his name to Spinner.

When I walked to the pasture, Spinner was quick to come to me. He responded to the gentlest commands. I could ride him easily without a saddle or even a bit in his mouth. He was gentle and became a favorite horse of our grandchildren. We would say, in horse lingo, that he was "well broke." Spinner gave up his wild nature and aligned his will with his master's will.

Spinner underwent a major transformation, but it took time, patience, and a lot of work. Through this process of change, Spinner's life improved immensely, and so did mine! It broke



my heart when he passed away. We buried him in a place of honor, marked with a hitching post and his halter.

In a similar though much more meaningful way, we are invited to change and submit ourselves to God, who is our Master. In the New Testament we read:

“Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

“Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you” (James 4:7–8).

Submitting to God

President Ezra Taft Benson (1899–1994) described some of the blessings that come to us as we draw nigh to God and align our will with His: “Men and women who turn their lives over to God will discover that He can make a lot more out of their lives than they can. He will deepen their joys, expand their vision, quicken their minds, strengthen their muscles, lift their spirits, multiply their blessings, increase their opportunities, comfort their souls, raise up friends, and pour out peace.”²

Blessings do come as we submit our will to Heavenly Father, and the more fully we submit our will to Him, the richer the blessings will be. They may not be the blessings we expect, but they will always be the blessings we need.

Real joy is available to each of us as we align ourselves with God. To experience this joy, we must learn to follow the enticings of the Spirit—the things of God—rather than the enticings of the adversary—the things of the natural man. Because of the Father’s gift of agency, we choose daily which enticings to follow.

In Matthew we read, “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon” (Matthew 6:24).

As my Grandma Jenny, who was a true cowgirl, used to say, “You can’t ride two horses at the same time.”³

Enticements of the Adversary

The adversary entices us to be lazy, complacent, discouraged, indifferent, and doubting. He also entices us to give in

to appetites of the flesh, such as violating the Word of Wisdom, viewing pornography, breaking the law of chastity, or engaging in other immoral practices. If we are wise, we ignore and shun those enticements. We exercise self-control and develop the capacity to avoid them. If we are injured by them, or if we become ensnared by them, we can escape through repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and His Atonement. Though some things may take time to overcome, nothing is impossible—including repudiation of sin, repentance, forgiveness, and healing.

Another enticement of the adversary is pride. President Benson described pride as “the great stumbling block.”⁴

One sign of pride is pushing back or turning away from God or from others who invite us to do God’s will. A resistant and prideful condition is described well in the Book of Mormon: “Behold, they do not desire that the Lord their God, who hath created them, should rule and reign over them; notwithstanding his great goodness and his mercy towards them, they do set at naught his counsels, and they will not that he should be their guide” (Helaman 12:6).

In other words, pride says, “Don’t tell me what to do. Don’t try to control my life.”

When we rebel or turn our backs toward God, we are actually turning our backs on true joy and happiness. Elder Neal A. Maxwell (1926–2004) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles said, “Only by aligning our wills with God’s is full happiness to be found.”⁵

Pride, that sinister, grievous, subtle, disrupting, insidious, menacing, and rotten attribute of the natural man, constantly pulls us to focus on ourselves: our looks, our talents, our desires, our goals, our passions—on me, me, me. We look inward rather than outward toward others or upward toward God. Pride causes us to focus on what we want instead of on what others want or on what God wants.

The antidote for pride is humility. It is humbling ourselves and putting God’s will above our own, seeking what He wants instead of what we want, and aligning our will with His.

It is often challenging to recognize pride in ourselves. As President Benson described, we often sin in ignorance.⁶ When

I lose the Spirit or feel distant from God or from others, I find it helpful to ask myself, “Is it pride that is causing this problem?” Inevitably, the Spirit whispers, “Yes, it is!”

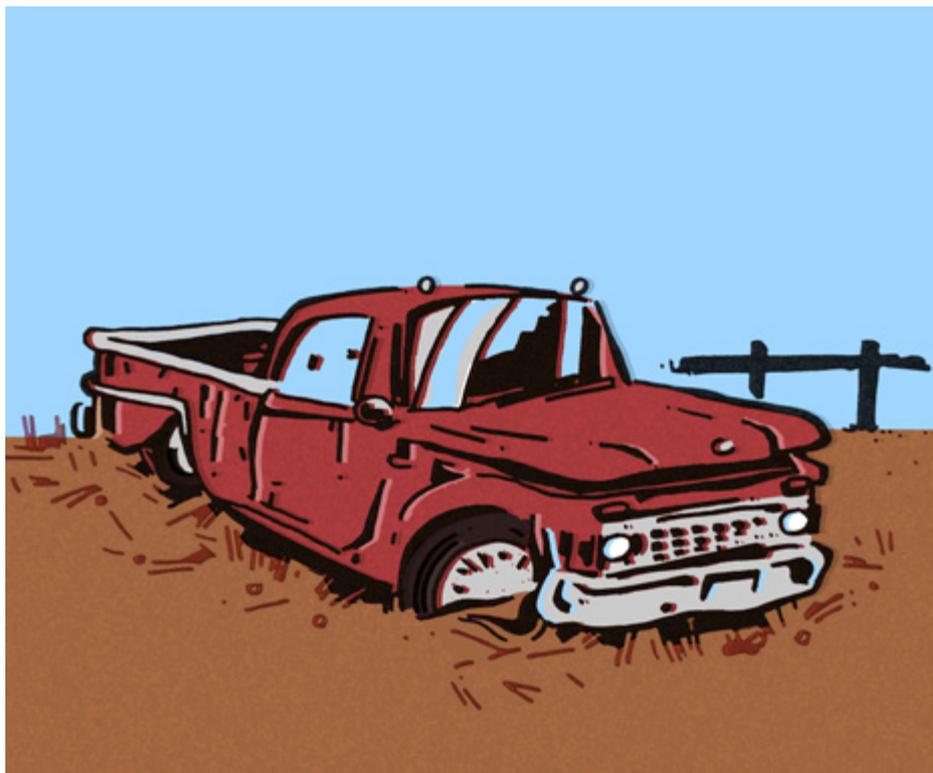
I am grateful for the Lord’s mercy and kindness in helping us overcome our weaknesses. It is not easy to ask the question “Is it pride?” or to accept the answer. But recognizing pride is the first step toward overcoming it. We can then identify what we need to work on, humble ourselves, plead for forgiveness, let our pride go, and align our will with God’s.

Yes, the enticings of the adversary are real, but the enticings of the Holy Spirit are also real—and powerful! As we obey and yield to the enticings of the Spirit to pray, study the scriptures, and serve others, we begin to see who we really are—from God’s perspective and not just from our own. We feel God’s pure love for us and recognize our infinite worth. We can feel comforted, valued, and lifted. And often the enticings of the Spirit and our feelings of God’s love will prompt us to repent, change, and become better.

Both Feet in the Stirrups

One evening during my missionary service in Germany, my companion and I were teaching a lesson on honesty. We taught the investigators that stealing is taking something that does not belong to you. Suddenly, an experience forcefully came back to my memory.

As a 16-year-old, I had fixed up an old truck to drive to school and work, but it was an ongoing challenge to keep it running. One day, when a friend and I were driving along a country road, we noticed a truck similar to mine discarded in a field. The old truck was partially dismantled and rusting away, but it had a part that was missing from my truck. Since the truck appeared to be



abandoned, I rationalized that surely no one would miss the part. My friend encouraged me, and we removed the part from the abandoned truck and put it on my truck.

As I taught the investigators, I was pained by my having taken the part. I knew it was wrong. The Spirit helped me understand that from God’s point of view, I had not been honest. I began repenting and asking God for forgiveness. I realized that to be a true disciple of Jesus Christ, to teach gospel principles, and to testify with power, I must be living those principles. From a cowboy’s perspective, I knew I had to have both feet in the stirrups.

This incident was on my mind for the remaining 18 months of my mission. When I returned home, it was a great relief to find the owner of that old truck, reimburse him for what I had taken, and complete my repentance. At last I felt clean, and I was filled with joy and peace.

The Path of Repentance

The path of repenting and changing is a path that each of us can follow, no matter our situation. It is a joyful path we walk with the Savior. As we do, we come to better understand His great power, mercy, and love. We better comprehend who He is and therefore who we are and who we have the

potential to become. The path of repentance is the path that leads to becoming a Saint.

The first step along the path is to exercise faith in God and pray to Him with real intent, sharing our heartfelt feelings. We may feel a desire to repent of our sins, to be cleansed and healed. We may also be filled with resolve and strength to change and progress. The Spirit will guide us, and Jesus Christ will help us along the path.

It took approximately 15 years for Spinner’s nature to change significantly. Heavenly Father doesn’t expect immediate perfection. He accepts our efforts, but He would not have us delay. He would have us come unto Him now and work to become “submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon [us]” (Mosiah 3:19). He wants us to be His.

Discipleship can at times be challenging, but if we have faith and cultivate the Spirit, we can “cowboy up”—face the challenge with determination—and learn to put off the natural man. It can be a joyful process.

I love the scripture in the Book of Mormon that describes this pattern of living and progressing: “They did fast and pray oft, and did wax stronger and stronger in their humility, and firmer and firmer in the faith of Christ, unto the filling their souls with joy and consolation, yea, even to the purifying and the sanctification of their hearts, which sanctification cometh because of their yielding their hearts unto God” (Helaman 3:35).

I invite each of us to yield our hearts to God, to align our will with His, and to truly change. We can ask ourselves, “Am I stuck as a Stubby, or am I becoming a Spinner? Am I following my own course and striving to please myself, or do I desire to please God? Am I attempting to satisfy the appetites of the natural man, or am I striving to please my Master?”

Heavenly Father can help us answer these questions. He can also help us in our quest to improve and become more like the Savior.

I know that as we submit and yield our hearts to God, He will bless us. Jesus Christ sets the perfect example for us. His only desire is to fulfill God’s plan. God’s will is His will. God’s

work is His work. They are one. Even when faced with making the ultimate sacrifice, Jesus submitted His will to His Father’s, saying, “Not my will, but thine, be done” (Luke 22:42).

I bear testimony that through Jesus Christ and His Atonement, we can do all things—including putting off the natural man and becoming Saints. ■

From a devotional address, “Putting Off the Natural Man and Becoming Saints,” given at Brigham Young University on October 10, 2017. For the full address, go to speeches.byu.edu.

NOTES

1. See Spencer W. Kimball, “Ocean Currents and Family Influences,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1974, 112.
2. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Ezra Taft Benson* (2014), 42–43.
3. Jenny Afton Skeen Cook (1906–91).
4. *Teachings: Ezra Taft Benson*, 239.
5. Neal A. Maxwell, “Swallowed Up in the Will of the Father,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 23.
6. *Teachings: Ezra Taft Benson*, 232.

